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THE MERRY MONTH OF MAY.

PHŒBE :

A CANADIAN PASTORAL POEM.

BY BRIERSTAFF.

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"...turns to thoughts
of love." — TENNYSON.

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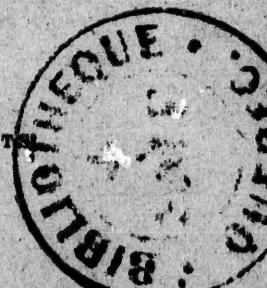
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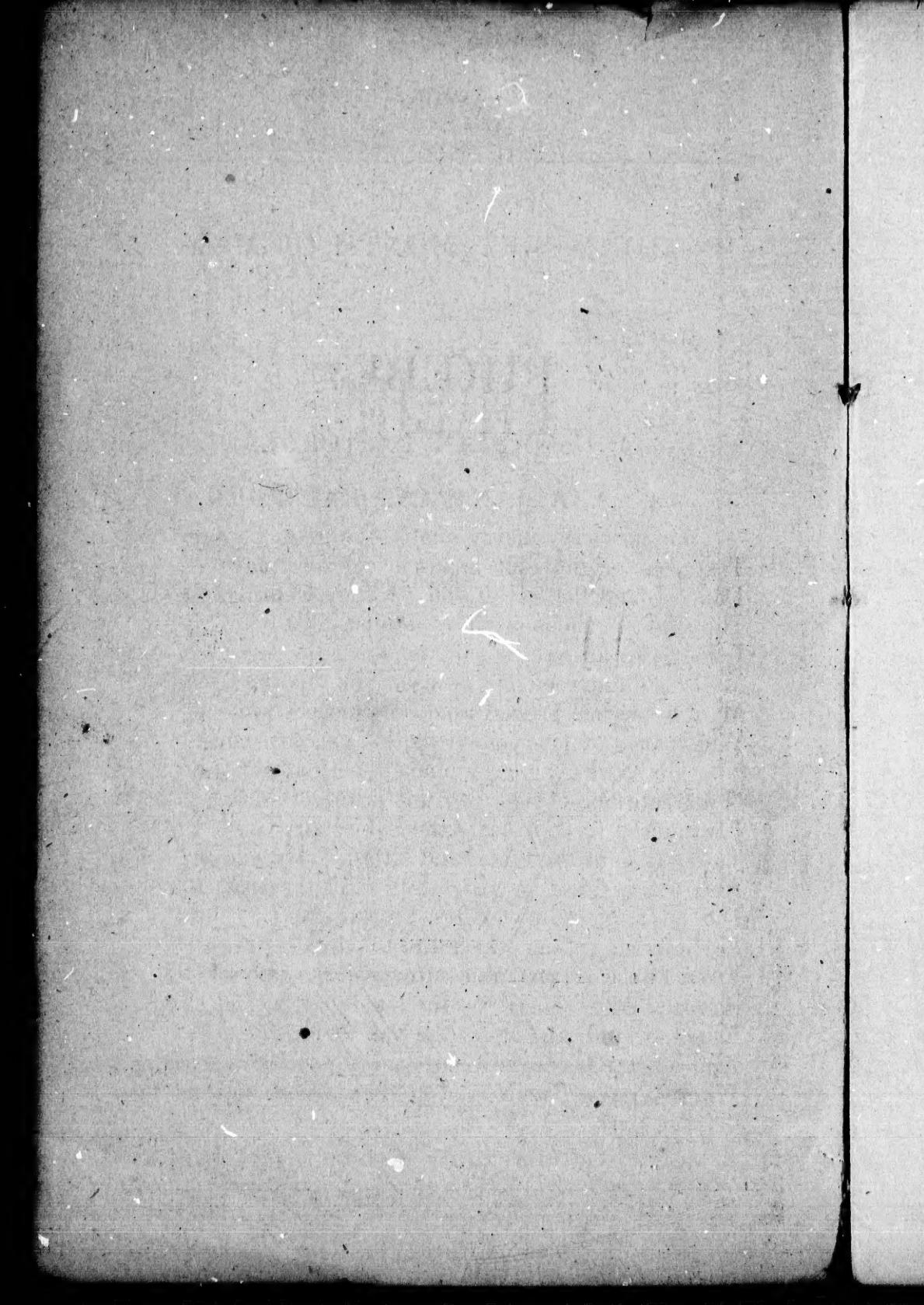
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PHŒBE:

A CANADIAN PASTORAL.

Go sport my merry lambs—be glad, be gay,
Toss your bright, elfin heads in cunning play,
Dance round the mead, and let your bleatings fill
The silvery echoes of th' awakened hill ;
I, too, with answering sounds, can glad essay
My long dumb reed, and pleased your sports survey—
My Phœbe has proved kind ; no more I pine
With pangs of love—its joys, its joys are mine.

Go sport my merry lambs—be glad, be gay ;
'Twas late one eve in fragrant prime of May,
I wandered forth to taste the balmy air,
To court light thoughts, and banish surly care ;
And was it fate ? or yet, while slept the will,
Did Love, alert, my aimless steps impel ?
For now, emerging where the wood-path breaks
From forest glooms, and into sunshine wakes,
Aroused from reverie by the sudden glow,
I look around, and know the vale below,
And know the cot, half-hid 'mid blossomed bowers,
Where Phœbe dwells, and glads the rosy hours.

Go sport my merry lambs—be glad, be gay,
With sober pace I wend my upland way,
And pensive seek the fragrant balsam grove,
Where oft resorts the Phœbe of my love.
Skirting the wood that bounds her father's field,
Its plushy walks a grateful coolness yield.
There, soft reclined, I breathe rich, odorous balm,
My spirit, soothed, drinks Nature's holy calm.
Fresh, fragrant flowerets lily-white uprear
Their slender stalks, and shed their perfumes near ;
And airy flitting through the spicy grove,
Spring's tuneful train chant their melodious love ;
And e'en like these, on fluttering, eager wing,
Within my breast fond, tender feelings spring ;
Phœbe is all my thought—I long to hear
Her gentle voice, and feel her presence near.

Go sport my merry lambs—be glad, be gay ;
I watched the sunbeams with the shadows play,
I watched the song-birds flitting airy round,
With spoils of gathered flowers I strewed the ground.
But Phœbe still is all my thought—her grace,
Her charms before my vision still I place,
I frame soft words, and feign her low replies,
Her glad looks scan, her love-illumined eyes ;
For while, as now, no jealous bodings blind,
No stormy doubts disturb my halcyon mind ;
Still true and kind, my fancied Phœbe ne'er
Smiles but to bless, speaks but to soothe my care.

Go sport my merry lambs—be glad, be gay ;
Far o'er the meads my wistful glances stray,
Where, through the russet trunks, an open space
Permits the scene beyond unchecked to trace.
Far off I view the sunny cot where bides

My gentle Phœbe, and with grace presides ;
For well she knows a mother's vacant place—
Vacant with death's untimely blow to grace.
And now, an Ariel grown, on wings of thought,
Invisible, my Phœbe have I sought ;
I hear her voice, and see her winning smile—
The happy household pleased, attend the while,
Where by the tasteful board, taught by her skill
To please, ranged round, they share the evening meal.
Her father, proud, admires her wit and grace,
And tender minds him of a once dear face ;
The children, with confiding trust, survey,
Her fond regards, and, loving, own her sway.

Go sport my merry lambs—be glad, be gay ;
Love in his wanderings came to me one day.
Late had he left his bright celestial seat,
With Phœbe seeking a more sure retreat,
Whence sallying oft in all his armour dight,
He better might surprise the unguarded wight ;
E'en thence to me, all wreathed in smiles, he came,
Nor knew I that he bore the dreaded name.
All guileless seemed the playful, merry boy,
As round him sported laughter, wit, and joy ;
I bade him welcome, boding naught of harm,
I laughed at ease, unconscious of alarm,
Till, waked one morn, dismayed, I looked around,
And found my heart was nowhere to be found !
Gone, hopeless gone, and with it all my peace—
Gone, pledged and pawned, and doubtful of release.

Go sport my merry lambs—be glad, be gay ;
There, as upon my sylvan couch I lay,
I called to mind each loving, fond regard,
Each kind, caressing act, each gentle word,

Such coin of subtle Love as firm may bear
Legible worth, and palpable appear,
And such as Phœbe from her virgin store
Erewhile had lent, e'en these I counted o'er,
And conned with more than miser care, and weighed
Their worth intrinsic, and the sum surveyed ;
Fain would I swell the dear amount, and view
All I possessed as but an earnest true
Of greater wealth of bliss yet to be mine
When Phœbe's self should to my suit incline.
Ah, why, I said, why longer thus delay
To know my bliss assured while yet I may,
Ere some more pressing claimant for the prize
Bear her away before my hopeless eyes ;
For many a longing look of loving swain
Scanned Phœbe's charms, all covetous to gain,
And this that should have urged me on, the same
Still held me back, nor gave my love to claim.
Perhaps, I mused, and bitter stifling pain
Thrilled every nerve and crushed my throbbing brain,
E'en now, while lingering, I of Phœbe dream,
Some other suitor is her favorite theme,
More blessed than I, high throned within her thought,
To whom the homage of her soul is brought—
The thought was madness, I would rise and know
At once my best or worst of joy or woe.

Go sport my merry lambs—be glad, be gay ;
E'en then a sound of singing where I lay,
Came borne from far upon the evening breeze ;
I knew the voice so potent erst to please,
To wake the thrill of joy through all my frame,
To soothe the soul, or with high transports flame,
The voice that oft seemed with far reaching sound,

The “open sesame” to deeps profound,
To hidden heavens of bliss undimmed by cares,
Where rosy splendours and soft balmy airs
O’erwhelm the soul with ravishing delight;
As they who wander through the balmy night,
The rose-tinged gloom of torrid groves, oft feel
A gay delirium o’er their senses steal,
Breathed from th’ aroma of rich orange flowers,
And spicy odours of the fragrant bowers.
But now the same charmed voice, all joyful heard,
With my unhappy mood, but rudely jarred.
Wronged by the merry strain I felt, and grieved,
That she, who had perchance my hopes deceived,
Should now, e’en now, at thought of happy fate
With other linked than mine, thus sing elate.

Go sport my merry lambs—be glad, be gay ;
I saw my Phœbe upward wend her way,
Tracing the narrow path that, winding round
The greening slope, passed to the wood beyond ;
Singing she came, with buoyant step, and seemed
The goddess Spring, as poets such have deemed,
’Mid flowery meads, who paint her fair and young,
Radiant with smiles and ravishing with song.
The doubt and longing that my soul opprest,
Now woke with double force within my breast,
At sight of her, who, more than fabled star
Of destiny, my peace could make or mar.
I rose to meet her, all resolved to know
Whether my hopes unhappy to forego,
Or that her will should second my desire,
Bidding all doubt in certainty expire.
Softly I went, and unperceived drew near
Her on whose word thus poised my hope and fear.

Sudden she paused, struck dumb, like startled bird,
When footsteps rustling through the grove are heard ;
Anon advanced, her beauteous face enwreathed
With smiles and blushes, where coy pleasure breathed ;
I caught the sign, and deemed the omen fair,
Propitious most in what most moved my care.

Go sport my merry lambs—be glad, be gay ;
My doubts had vanished, and light thoughts bore sway.
With cordial words I Phœbe warmly greet—
She kind responds in accents low and sweet.
Forth had she come, while evening yet delayed,
Seeking where now her father's flocks had strayed,
Careful lest, wandering late, night's dewy chill
Should breed the tender lambs some fatal ill.
Nor by the cotes, nor in the fields around,
Trace of the bleating wanderers had she found.
Short distance from her father's fields there lay,
Girt by th' unbroken forest's grim array,
A cultured spot, long since the peopled scene
Where rose the settler's cabin o'er the green ;
But now deserted, and with grass o'ergrown,
The haunt of straggling herds and flocks alone—
Deeming her father's flocks had thither strayed,
To seek them there now came the careful maid.

Go sport my merry lambs—be glad, be gay ;
I joined the search, she sought me not to stay.
Together o'er the forest paths we passed,
While round us woods their deepening shadows cast.
Calm slumbering in the evening's balmy air,
The maple spread her foliaged clusters fair,
The beech low down her leafy mantle drew,
The pine o'er all his regal glances threw,
And in their leafy hammocks lightly swung,

Sly sunbeams peeped forth as we moved along—
The pert, spruce robin, twittering, feigned surprise,
Turned his bright head, and blinked his cunning eyes,
Then high from leafy bough poured forth a strain
That spoke of love, but breathed not of his pain.
Our looks, our tones—how could they else?—but
showed,

But spoke the love, the joy that round us glowed.
Thus lost in converse sweet, with lingering pace,
Softly we pass the intervening space,
Till reached the open spot where greenly spread,
Smoothly 'mid depth of woods the lonely mead;
There safe at length the missing flocks we found,
Grazing at ease, while lambkins sported round.

Go sport my merry lambs—be glad, be gay;
A streamlet gurgled clear with breezy play,
Where near a grove of trembling aspens stood,
Fringing with lighter green the circling wood,—
Here, on a fallen pine all bleached and peeled,
We sit us down to rest, so Phœbe willed.
Amid the slender grass, close at our feet,
The gay wood-violet breathed its perfumes sweet—
O'erhead, close-perched the rustling leaves among,
The sparrow, lilting, swelled his evening song—
The tender yeanlings raise a plaintive cry,
Their grazing dams bleat forth a fond reply—
Two milk-white doves lave in the bubbling stream,
Then swell their plumage to the setting beam,
Anon, perched on a cedar's leafless bough,
They coo and dally in the roseate glow.
An hour was that for love to rule, I trow,
To urge his plea, to speak his ardent vow;
I eyed my chance—Who said that love is blind?

I was not slow, nor was my fair unkind—
Close at her side, I took her hand in mine,
I urged my suit, she gave the welcome sign,
Warm to my heart her gentle form I pressed,
With loving trust she nestled to my breast.
O the pure rapture of that hour, the bliss,
The long embrace, the warm, warm, gushing kiss.
I blame not woman, that a Paradise
She lost us, while I taste such heavenly joys.

Go sport my merry lambs—be glad, be gay ;
And cease my rude, thus cease my artless lay.
What mortal power can speak immortal joy ?
Be dumb my reed, nor vain thy powers employ ;
Let ecstacy like this in silence sway,
Or breathe through Nature's sounds itself away.
Here where with soothing voice the wandering rill
Comes prattling gayly round the greening hill,
Where bleat of flocks, with chime of tinkling bells,
Soft in the breeze's sigh melodious swells,
Where sound of rustling leaves and happy hum
Of insect life, danced in the sunbeams, come—
Here, by this oak screened from the mid-day beam,
Here let me lay myself and sweetly dream
Such bliss was mine, free to be mine again,
Too large for words, too sweet for gentlest strain !

